



The COLUMBIA COUNTY GROWTH MANAGEMENT PLAN

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■ Preface

Forward 2020: Columbia County Growth Management Plan is a long-range plan for managing and guiding Columbia County's development over the next 20 years and beyond. It is intended to be comprehensive in its approach and holistic in its examination of the County's status and direction, in order to make recommendations for a strategy for implementation in the future. The Plan will serve as a basis for local decision making for years to come.

Forward 2020: Columbia County Growth Management Plan has been prepared under the guidelines of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs for preparation of local Comprehensive Plans. In order for a county to be designated as a Qualified Local Government by the state, it must adopt a comprehensive plan that meets or exceeds the DCA guidelines.

Forward 2020: Columbia County Growth Management Plan is the second plan update prepared by the County, with the original plan adopted in 1989. In 1994, the County undertook a five-year assessment of the original Growth Management Plan. This assessment revealed that Columbia County had become a very different place than it had been just five years earlier. There were more people, new developments, new challenges, and changing issues that needed to be examined and reflected in a new plan. The County decided that more than a simple update to the Plan was needed, and a major rewrite of the entire Growth Management Plan was necessary.

Now, ten years after adoption of the first Growth Management Plan (and certification by DCA as a Qualified Local Government), the County has embarked on a major update of the Plan to keep it consistent with trends and changing conditions. This update is intended to be a responsible plan—one that recognizes the County's role in the Augusta Metro region while maintaining our own identity. This Plan is the product of many hours of hard work and dedication by countless persons. It was prepared with the assistance of a Steering Committee appointed by the County Commission. The committee's attention and input to the project were vital components to the Plan's success and cannot be overstated.

In December 1999, the County held a "kick-off" meeting and public hearing to begin the process. Subsequently, monthly Steering Committee Meetings from December 1999, to November 2000, were held to discuss issues and to review progress. In December 2000, a "wrap-up" public hearing was held to gather additional public input to finalize the draft plan document. Subsequently, the draft was transmitted to the Central Savannah River Area Regional Development Center and the Georgia Department of Community Affairs for their review and comment.

This resulting Plan document will serve as a blueprint for County action with a view toward the next 20 years.

■ Public Participation

The State's *Minimum Planning Standards and Procedures* requires two public hearings, the first prior to the preparation of the plan, and the second prior to transmission from the County Commission to the Central Savannah River Regional Development Commission for review. The County felt that a much stronger citizen participation plan was necessary to capture the feelings, needs and desires of its residents. Citizen participation has both met and exceeded the

minimum requirements of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA). The County appointed a Steering Committee of interested and influential citizens, business interests and other stakeholders to assist and advise the Planning Team. Input from committee members and the general public were incorporated into the overall Plan, and individual planning elements. The first and last meetings were specifically advertised as Public Hearings, in accordance with the requirements of DCA, although all meetings were open to the public throughout the process.

■ The Planning Process

Georgia's *Minimum Planning Standards and Procedures* require that all local government Comprehensive Plans follow a specific planning process in their development. This process consists of the following three steps, as described by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. The results of these three steps are interwoven into the plan elements that follow:

Step 1: Inventory and Assessment

In order to plan for the future, a community must know about its existing conditions. This step answers the questions "what do we have as a community?" and "What is good or bad about our community?" Once completed, this step provides a picture of the existing conditions within a community.

Step 2: Statement of Needs and Goals

Based upon the inventory and assessment, existing community needs are identified and goals for future growth and development are prepared. These goals provide guidance for the community and the framework from which detailed policies and recommendations are developed. This step of the planning process answers the question "Where do we want to go?"

Step 3: Implementation Strategy

This step combines all of the plan's recommendations and describes how they will be implemented. This step answers the question "How are we going to get there?" The State's *Minimum Planning Standards and Procedures* also require that a Short-Term Work Program be prepared as part of the Implementation Strategy. The Short-Term Work Program is a listing of specific actions that a local government anticipates taking over the next five years to implement its plan. The Implementation Strategy and its Short-Term Work Program is designed to ensure that the plan will become a working tool, which will be used to guide decision-making rather than being just another unused report on the shelf.

■ Plan Elements

The basic planning process is applied to each of the planning elements required in the State's *Minimum Planning Standards and Procedures*. The following briefly describes the six topical areas, or planning elements, that local governments must consider in their plans:

Population

This element provides the foundation for the plan. In order to plan for the future, the County must have a general idea of approximately how many people to plan for. The Minimum Planning Standards and Procedures require that all local plans contain an analysis of historical population, estimated population and projected population. Only Step 1, Inventory and Assessment, of the planning process is applied to the Population Element.

Housing

This element provides an inventory and assessment of the county's housing. The inventory includes the age, type, condition, and location of housing units within the county. Based upon population projections, a rough estimate of the number of additional housing units needed to house the county's future population can be made. Goals and strategies are developed to address existing needs and the future provision of housing in the community.

Economic Development

This element provides an inventory and assessment of the county's economic base and its labor force. An analysis of past trends of the county's economic base and its labor force, as well as an analysis of regional comparison in these areas, will provide insight into the county's economic health. An understanding of the county's economy is necessary in order to develop goals and strategies for the county's future economic development.

Natural and Historic Resources

This element provides an inventory and assessment of the county's natural features (topography, wetlands, prime agricultural and forest land, plant and animal habitats, etc.) and historic resources (historic homes, landmark buildings, etc.) Goals, objectives, and policies are developed to address the impact that future population growth and its related development could have on these resources, as well as what role they could play in economic development. Because of their importance, natural and historic resources are discussed in separate chapters of the Plan.

Transportation and Community Facilities

This element provides an inventory and assessment of the various services that are provided by the County or other public and private groups. Existing needs are identified. The impact of future population growth on public services such as public safety, water and sewer, transportation, schools and solid waste disposal is addressed. Goals and strategies are developed to address the future provision of community facilities; transportation is discussed in a separate chapter due to the extensive nature of these facilities.

Land Use

This element provides an inventory and assessment of how land is used in the county. The estimated acreage of each land use type is calculated and projections are made of the amount of land use required to meet the demands of future populations and employment growth. Goals

and strategies are developed to address existing land use problems and to address how the county's land should be used in the future.

■ **Implementation Strategy**

The inventory and assessment of needs presented for each Plan Element, combined with the county's vision for the future, results in goals and strategies for Plan implementation over the next 20 years. In turn, a shorter term Work Program is outlined for the next 5 years—what is to be accomplished by whom, and with what funds.

Over time, changes will occur in the county that may not have been anticipated and over which the county may have no control—changing lifestyles, national or regional economic shifts, and very importantly, the impact of telecommuting or internet access on working and shopping patterns, etc. Annually monitoring these shifts against progress in Plan implementation may lead to the need for amendments to the Plan. In addition, the State has certain requirements for amendments and updates that must be followed. The final part of the Implementation Strategy, therefore, deals with annual review of the Plan and Short Term Work Program updates, amendment procedures, and ultimately a full Plan Update in 5 to 10 years, depending on the extent to which the Plan has been kept current.